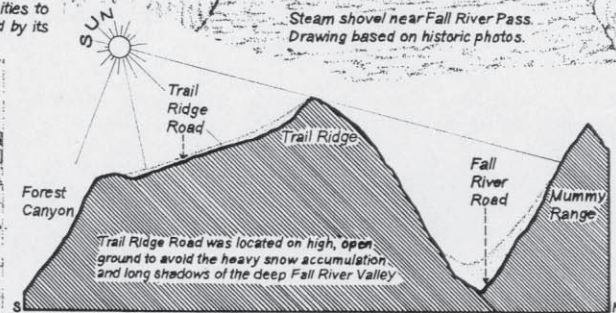
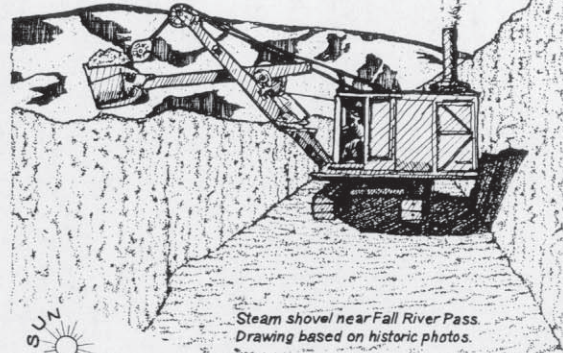


SNOW REMOVAL

Reaching heights of more than 12,000' above sea level, the roads in Rocky Mountain National Park are frequently buried deep in snow. The winter snowpack is often more than twenty feet deep, and twice that in areas buried by avalanches. Removing snow from the roads is a difficult and dangerous maintenance task.

Immediately after the Fall River Road was completed in 1920, park administrators realized that clearing snow would be a daunting task. The road climbed to Fall River Pass in a deep shaded valley, where avalanche chutes dumped deep accumulations of snow. The road was initially cleared with hand labor. Working conditions were severe. Cold temperatures combined with winds ranging up to more than 200 mph created extreme wind chill conditions. The high altitude sun caused snowblindness and severe sunburn. New avalanches would often cover cleared sections, forcing crews to repeat their work. Experiments were made with dynamiting and the use of blow torches, kerosene flares and carbide lamps, but it soon became clear that heavy equipment would be required. In 1925, the park acquired a specially designed steam shovel. In 1931 a "Sno-Go" rotary plow was placed in operation. Still, the tremendous snowpacks along the road were a major factor in deciding to construct the Trail Ridge Road on more open terrain. While the Trail Ridge Road was designed to pass through more open country with fewer places obstructed by heavy snow accumulation, the road climbed nearly a thousand feet higher than the Fall River Road and was also buried under deep snowpacks most years. By the time the road was completed in 1932, the park was using its new rotary plow. Even so, all old snow deeper than 45" had to be loosened with dynamite before it could be removed with machines. While heavier plows are now employed, opening the two park roads remains a tremendous and expensive undertaking. Despite periodic calls from tourist interests in nearby communities to keep the roads open year-round, crews face major challenges opening Trail Ridge Road by its target date of Memorial Day and Fall River Road by the Fourth of July.

FALL RIVER ROAD



TRAIL RIDGE ROAD

